In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

When a person looks at the world around him, he sees innumerable signs of Allah's Grace, Mercy and Sovereignty both within and outside him. By reflecting on these signs, he gets to know Allah i.e. he develops his belief in Him. This belief arouses feelings of love and gratitude to Him and brings him closer to Allah. Overwhelmed by these emotions he races towards his Creator and through prayer strengthens his connection with Him. The relationship between gratitude and prayer is clear from the fact that the essence of prayer is Surah Al-Fatiha which is a surah replete with praise and gratitude from the beginning to the end.

Prayer is a person's acknowledgement of Allah's godhood. The favours Allah has bestowed upon him are so many that even if a person was to stay in a state of constant dhikr (remembrance of Allah) he would not be able to render Allah His due. Through prayer he fulfils at least the minimum requirement of remembrance. The words and postures of humility and submissiveness in prayer is the way a person acknowledges Allah's supremacy, expresses his love and gratitude to Him and accepts his own helplessness in all his affairs. The words and supplications used in prayer are indicative of a person's submission to Allah and that all his actions are done to please Him alone. All the postures in prayer like Qiyam (standing), ruku (bowing) and sajdah (prostrating) are outward expressions of a person's pledge to make his heart, mind and body totally submissive to Allah.

The Real Purpose of Prayer

Allah tells us in the Quran: "Establish prayer for My remembrance."(20:14)

The real purpose of prayer is to prevent a person from becoming heedless to Allah. The deceptive attractions of this world should not make a person oblivious to the fact that he is merely a slave and is not independent and free to do whatever he wants. Thus, prayer which draws a person's attention away from his worldly occupations several times daily is the best reminder of this fact and serves to strengthen his relationship with Allah.

It is not possible for the heart to become heedless when remembrance of Allah is part of practically every period of the day and night. If this does start to happen, the very frequency of the remembrance in the form of regular prayers will ensure that heedlessness is eliminated in the same way water washes away impurities.

The Importance of Prayer

- Whenever the Quran talks about *"virtuous deeds"* it first mentions the establishment of prayer. **(Quran 2:277)**
- The performance of prayer has been enjoined as the first step for tazkiya (self-purification) which the Quran tells us is the purpose of religion. **(Quran 87:14-15)**
- Whenever the Quran talks about the requirements for success in the Hereafter, it gives the performance of prayer as the first requirement. **(Quran 23:1-2)**
- *"The Day that the shin shall be laid bare and they shall be summoned to bow in adoration but they shall not be able."* **(Quran 68:42)**
- The first reason for people being sent to Hell has also been given as the non-performance of prayers.

"They (people of Paradise) will question each other, and (ask) of the sinners: 'What led you into Hell-Fire?'" They will say: 'We were not of those who prayed.'" **(Quran 74:40-43)**

- *"But after them there followed a posterity who missed prayers and followed after lusts soon."* **(Quran 19:59)** meaning that the corruption of all

the earlier nations started when they began to abandon prayers. Due to this, their hearts became inattentive to Allah's remembrance and they increasingly became slaves to their vain desires

Performance of prayer is one of the requirements for staying in the fold of Islam. It is very clear from the Quran that in an Islamic state, only those people who offer their prayers and give zakah (obligatory alms) are eligible for the privileges accorded to Muslims. On the occasion of the commencement of action against the mushrikeen (polytheists) of Arabia, it was clearly stated: *" But (even so) if they repent, establish regular prayers and practice regular charity they are your brethren in faith:"* **(Quran 9:11)**

Prayer is the means of staying steadfastness in religion. Allah tells us:*"If anyone withdraws himself from remembrance of (Allah) Most Gracious, We appoint for him an evil one to be an intimate companion to him."* **(43:36)** Prayer saves us from this very withdrawal and heedlessness and protects us from Satan. In the Quran in Surah Al-Muminoon **(23:1-9)** and Surah Al-Ma'arij **(70:22-34)**, the list of criteria given for success in the Hereafter begins and ends with the performance of prayers. This clearly indicates that being regular in performing prayers is, in effect, the proof of a Muslim's steadfastness in his religion. Since Satan's attacks are ongoing, regular prayers enable a person to ward him off and like a fortress, protect the heart and mind. This is the reason that even at times of danger and fear, performance of prayers has been emphasized; it is obligatory to do it irrespective of whether one prays it standing or on one's means of conveyance.**(Quran 2:239)**

"Establish regular Prayer, for Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds;" **(Quran 29:45)** meaning that like an admonisher, it reminds a person that despite the innumerable worldly temptations and desires, he will one day, have to stand before his Lord and account for all his deeds.

Prayer erases a person's sins. When he stands up for prayer and performs it with full consciousness, he renews his pledge with Allah and promises to avoid disobeying Him. Consequently, he feels ashamed of any oversights committed between prayers and after performing his prayer, he returns to his worldly engagements with a firm resolve to abstain from sins. It is for this reason that the Prophet (SAW) has equated prayer to a river through which Allah washes away and erases the dirt i.e. the sins of a believer.

Prayer helps a person in his difficult times. It is the most effective way of drawing Allah's attention and seeking His help. Allah tells us:*"O you who believe! Seek help with patient perseverance and prayer."* **(Quran 2:153)**

Whenever the Prophet (SAW) encountered any difficulties he would hurry to pray. **(Ahmad)**

The establishment and protection of prayer is the first requirement of honouring the pledge made to Allah. To intentionally abandon the prayer is considered an act of rebellion. This is why the Prophet (SAW) said: *"He who abandons the prayer, then surely the responsibility (of Allah to forgive him) is finished."* **(Ibn e Majah)**

"Whoever guards and observes his prayer, they will be a light and a proof and a saviour for him on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever does not guard and observe them, they will not be a light or a proof or a savior for him. On the Day of Resurrection, he will be with Qarun, Fir'aun (Pharaoh), Haman and Ubayy ibn Khalf (One of the Chiefs of the polytheists in Makkah)." **(Ahmad)**

"The action which is dearest to Allah is prayer at its proper time." **(Bukhari)**

Prayer is part of the nature of everything in the universe. Every atom in it is glorifying and praising its Lord and is in prostration to Him. When a person stands up for prayer, he is saying: "Labbayk" (Here I am before you) on behalf of the entire universe and accepting the invitation to glorify, praise, bow and prostrate to Allah. He is proclaiming through this action that he will be at the fore in submitting not only his body, but also his spirit to his Lord.

Once a person recognizes these realities then he will wait impatiently morning and evening for the prayer time just as he looks forward to his mealtimes. He will be restless to perform it in the same way as a thirsty person is impatient for a drink and a hungry person for food. His spirit will savour the unique glorifications and supplications at various places in the Quran in much the same way that people relish the different varieties of food. In the midst of problems and difficulties prayer is the cooling breeze; it is like the approach of spring in the season of disappointments and the place of refuge in the face of opposition. This is why the Prophet (SAW) would say:*"Establish the prayer, O Bilal. Bring its comfort to us (i.e. give the call to prayer)."* **(Abu Dawood)**

The Prophet's Special Association with Prayer

The Prophet (SAW) used to pray so much that his feet used to become swollen, and when he was asked as to why he prayed so much, he would say,*"Shall I not be a thankful slave (to Allah)?"* **(Bukhari)**

When the Prophet (SAW) was engaged in prayer, he would weep so much that it would sound like the gurgling of a pot or like the rumbling of a mill, due to his weeping. **(Tirmidhi)**

The Prophet(SAW) was so totally merciful that despite facing extreme difficulties he never cursed anyone; but in the Battle of the Trench he could not bear the grief of not being able to pray at the proper time and used very harsh words: *"They (i.e. pagans) prevented us from offering the middle Prayer till the sun had set. May Allah fill their graves and their houses with fire."*

(Bukhari)

A few days before the Prophet (SAW) passed away, he had a high fever which caused him to faint several times; but every time he regained consciousness, his greatest concern was about prayer and he would ask: "Have the people prayed?' **(Bukhari)** Even in the last moments of his life, he ordered the people to perform prayers and be attentive to the slaves. He repeated it several times. **(Bukhari)**

Our Attitude

We live on Allah's earth, eat from the sustenance He provides for us, drink from the water He gives to us and benefit from His innumerable blessings - the sunlight, the air, the water etc. We see and hear with the eyes and ears and walk with the legs that Allah has given us. Yet, we have become so hard-hearted that when the Owner of the universe, from whose blessings we derive so much benefit calls us five times a day through the call for prayer, we are not even bothered to answer His call. If our employee was to ignore our summons, we would not be able to bear his disobedience and terminate his employment immediately.

For refusing one prostration Satan became an outcast forever, but the present day Muslim refuses to prostrate so many times daily. Without feeling any remorse for this refusal, he continues to eat and drink from the sustenance provided by his Lord and even believes that Paradise is reserved for him.

Whoever does not pray can never be truly grateful to his benefactor. So how can such a person render people their dues?

Allah tells us: *"So woe to the worshippers. Who are neglectful of their prayers"* **(Quran 107:4-5)**

If there is such bad news for worshippers (those who do perform their prayers) who are neglectful, then what is the fate of those who do not offer their prayers at all? This is despite the fact that Eeman (faith) gives security from destructive things. It means that if the practice of prayer does not go hand in hand with Eeman, to Allah it represents only an empty profession of faith and is devoid of the spirit of faith. For this reason the Prophet (SAW) said:*"Between a person and disbelief is discarding prayer."* **(Muslim)**

Our Prayers

We merely perform an imitation of prayer and expect the benefits which can only accrue from genuine prayer. Our body is performing the actions of prayer but the mind is busy elsewhere. We recite the Quran in prayer, do our adhkar (remembrance) and supplicate, but we have no idea what we are saying or what promises we are making. We do not remember Allah, but we simply recite the adhkar. We do not supplicate to Allah like a helpless petitioner, but simply repeat the words we have become accustomed to repeat. How strange it is that when we are in conversation with a person, we are very conscious of what is being said, but when we are engaged in supplicating to the Owner of the Universe Who controls everything in it, we are so distracted. This is definitely not the prayer that Allah and the Prophet (SAW) have commanded us to perform. This is not the establishment of prayer, but its destruction.

The first step we must take is to recognize the importance of prayer in our religion. We should repeatedly remind ourselves of its importance and then with complete single-mindedness, make it the focus of our attention. It is obligatory for every Muslim to learn to pray correctly as well as to know what is being said in it. Then, understanding what we are saying, we should perform prayer, this most important worship mode, with full concentration and presence of mind. We must also constantly endeavour to improve the quality of our prayers in order to keep coming closer and closer to Allah.

Improving the Quality of Our Prayer

Collect authentic ahadith about the Prophet's prayer and be on the lookout for good books and lectures of scholars on this subject.

Memorise the authentic and prescribed adhkar (remembrances), at the same time understanding their meaning. The Prophet (SAW) used to choose from a variety of supplications before reciting Surah Al-Fatiha, In addition to this, he (SAW) was known to use several different supplications during ruku (bowing), in the standing posture after bowing, in prostration, between prostrations and after the prayer. You should learn these so that you can improve the beauty and quality of your prayers.

"The most excellent prayer is that in which the duration of standing is longer." **(Muslim)** *Additionally, the Prophet (SAW) said: "Reciting the Quran during prayer is more excellent than reciting it at other times."***(Mishkat)**

So memorise as much of the Quran as you can, particularly the last juz (paras). Do at least memorise some long surahs like Surah Yasin, Al-Waqiah, Ar-Rahman and Al-Mulk etc. and understand their meanings so that you too can observe a long duration of standing during your prayer.

Try to reflect on the meaning of the Quranic verses and Masnoon (those done by our Prophet) supplications that you have memorized and change yourself according to them.

Prayers performed in privacy, have the most effect on one's life, so try your best to offer your nafal (voluntary) prayers in private. It is not the

number of nawafil that you offer that is important, but how well you perform them. Try to make the duration of your standing, your bowing and your prostrations as long as you can and while in qiyam (standing), try to recite as much as you can of the Quran, reflecting on its meaning and reciting it in a slow, measured and rhythmic way. On reaching the verses related to Allah's rewards and Paradise, supplicate to be amongst the people who will be rewarded with these. When you recite verses that mention Hell and the Day of Resurrection, weep and seek Allah's protection. Regarding the voluntary prayers, remember that on being asked which prayer is the best after the obligatory prayers, the Prophet (SAW) said: *"Prayer during the middle of the night* (Tahajjud)." **(Ahmad)**

"The nearest a servant comes to his Lord is when he is prostrating himself, so make supplication (in this state)." **(Muslim)**

So weep and supplicate to your Lord in prostration.

Satan cannot bear to see you performing your prayer in the best way, so he will employ every means to distract you. To protect yourself from him, you will have to be constantly alert and keep seeking help from Allah.

The duty of performing prayer well can only be fulfilled when it becomes, in the words of the Quran, *"Allah's remembrance."* The prayer should be performed in a way that Allah's remembrance takes over the entire being. For this, following are some suggestions:

At the Time of Adhan (call to prayer)

A person should consider the adhan as a summons from Allah and as soon as he hears it, like a devoted slave, start preparing for its performance and to go to the mosque.

Answer the adhan in the way prescribed by the Prophet (SAW) and then make your dua (supplications). The Prophet (SAW) said:

"The supplication made between the adhan and the iqamah is not rejected." **(Abu Dawood)**

At the Time of Wudhu (Ablution)

Wudhu is a means of purification in this world and beautification in the next. So perform ablution well and with full concentration, following the directives of the Prophet :

"If a person purifies himself for prayer, he expiates all of his sins and his prayer is considered an extra reward for him." **(Tabarani)**

*"My people will be summoned on the day of Resurrection with white faces and hands, and feet from the marks of ablution. If any of you can extend his brightness, let him do so."***(Bukhari)**

Going Towards the Mosque

"Give good tidings to those who walk to the mosques in darkness for having a perfect light on the Day of Judgement." **(Abu Dawood)**

"Allah will prepare for him who goes to the mosque (every) morning and in the afternoon (for the congregational prayer) an honourable place in Paradise with good hospitality for (what he has done) every morning and afternoon." **(Bukhari)**

"When he enters the mosque he is considered in prayer as long as he is waiting for the prayer." **(Bukhari)**

"The reward of the congregational prayer is twenty seven times greater (than that of the prayer offered by a person alone)." **(Bukhari)**

"If the people knew what is the reward of making the call (for the prayer) and (of being in) the first row (in the prayer), and if they found no other way to get this privilege except by casting lots, they would certainly cast lots for it. If they knew the reward of the noon prayer, they would race for it, and if they

knew the reward of the morning (i.e. Fajr) and Isha prayers, they would present themselves for the prayer even if they had to crawl to reach there." **(Bukhari)**

- *"He who observed the Isha prayer in congregation, it was as if he prayed up to the midnight, and he who prayed the morning prayer in congregation, it was as if he prayed the whole night."* **(Muslim)**

Entering the Mosque

- *"When you hear the Iqama, proceed to offer the prayer with calmness and solemnity and do not make haste. And pray whatever you are able to pray and complete whatever you have missed."* **(Bukhari)**

Enter with your right foot first and read the supplication for entering the mosque. If possible, first pray two rakahs of Tahiyyatul Masjid.

- *"Straighten the rows for the prayer, as the straightening of the rows is amongst those things which make your prayer a correct and perfect one."* **(Bukhari)**

Create Khushu and Khudu (submissiveness and concentration) in Your Prayers

Allah demands from us that we offer our prayers with khushu and khudu. We should not let our glances stray here and there and our entire body should be in a state which reflects that we are in the presence of the Creator of this universe. Following are some of the ways of achieving this state:

- You should try as much as possible to offer your prayers in a place where there is least likelihood of distractions.
- Before starting to pray, reflect on all Allah's favours upon you. Think of this prayer as your gift to Allah and a means of approach to Him. It should be your aim to present it to Him in the most perfect manner and that you should not do anything which will make it unacceptable to Allah.
- Remind yourself that this could be your last prayer.
- During Qiyam (standing posture), try to visualise the Day of Resurrection and your being presented to Allah. The realization of His blessing upon you and your own shortcomings should make you feel truly humbled and ashamed of your ingratitude.
- During your entire prayer imagine that Allah the Majestic and Glorious is watching to see the quality of performance of each and every part of your prayer.
- Perform the prayer with full consciousness and concentration. When in the standing posture, try to feel that you are standing humbly before Allah. When bowing and prostrating realize that it means you have submitted yourself to the Creator and Master of the Universe.
- During prayer, focus on the meaning of the words you are using and what it is that you are saying to your Creator. This will really help you to focus on your prayer.
- Read the tilawah (recitation of the Quran) and the adhkar (remembrances) in such a tone that you can hear them but that it does not distract the person praying beside you. Also let your mind follow your voice, words and actions, for example :*"Now I am reading a surah.."*
- The Prophet (SAW) instructed a man who did not perform prayer with the required calmness and tranquility to pray again: He said:" *Go back and pray as you have not prayed (properly)."* **(Bukhari)** He also said: *"The worst people are the thieves who steal part of the prayer." He was asked how this was done, and he replied, "He does not complete his bowings and prostrations."* **(Ahmad)**

This is why it is important to perform each action with calmness. If the difference in the time between praying hurriedly and praying calmly is

hardly 2 or 3 minutes then why should you be amongst those referred to as the ones who *"steal part of the prayer"*?

- When you pray see how much of it you did consciously. If for example you were alert in only two of the four rakahs and heedless in the remaining two, then pray an equivalent number of nawafil. Due to the difficulty in doing this, next time, you will stop yourself from letting your mind wander in prayer. The less your concentration in prayers, the more nawafil you should read.
- It is impossible for a person who does not refrain from sins to attain concentration in his prayers. So stay away from sins.

Try to use whichever techniques given above that you find easy. If you continue to practice them for a few days, In Sha Allah, you will achieve success and it will become easier to retain your concentration in prayer.

LASTLY

The Prophet (SAW) said: *"The coolness of my eyes is prayer."* **(Nasa'i)**

It is surprising that despite knowing this, the majority of Muslims are not desirous to acquire the 'coolness of the eyes'. The prevalent restlessness, lack of peace, problems and difficulties in our lives naturally demand finding a solution and a well-performed prayer is the solution to this dilemma we find ourselves in.

Prayer is not only important for success in the Hereafter, but also gives us incredible peace of mind in this very world. It provides a person with the opportunity five times a day to present himself to the One who owns and controls everything in the universe and who has the power to make anything happen. He is Ar-Rauf (The Compassionate) and Al-Wakil (The Trustee) and by a mere command, He can replace our worries and anxieties with peace and blessings. He is the Owner and Creator of all the means and can easily create the means to solve our problems.

He is Al-Aziz (The Mighty One), Al-Qadir (The Able), Al- Muqtadar (The Powerful), so He can foil the evil plots of the individuals or nations we are so afraid of and make their own scheming rebound on them. If He wants, He can also bestow upon us strong faith and good character which will lead to our regaining our collective strength and power. He is the Malik-ul-Mulk (the Owner of Sovereignty) and it is within His power to solve all our problems and bless us with peace of mind and sense of security. If He wants, He can make us so strong that the enemy would not even dare to look at us. He is Ar-Razzak (The Provider) and Al-Shaafi (The Healer) and Al-Badi (The Originator) and holds the cure for our poverty, weakness, sickness and the fear that our children may adopt erroneous ways. All the cures to our maladies are within His power.

These are, after all, the anxieties and sorrows that preoccupy us. The One who has the soothing balm for our wounds invites us repeatedly to come to Him for the solution to all our problems, but we evade Him, and escape here and there. What can one say about someone who is suffering severely from his ailment and yet is not willing to undergo the treatment for it?

May Allah make our prayers the delight of our hearts and the coolness of our eyes and select our foreheads for prostrating to Him.

Ameen.

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